



## Politicians ‘Neal’ at the altar of hollow civil rights rhetoric

By Jim Waters

The commitment to the *hard work* necessary to ensure civil rights for all Americans does not begin to match the *rhetoric* heard these days about the 46-year-old [Civil Rights Act](#).

A black pastor friend of mine says the recent bluster over the legislation reminds him of the biblical admonition against being “wells without water and clouds without rain.”

Much of it is the kind of empty rhetoric that equates to a dark sky with swollen clouds promising to end a long drought, only to have them pass without a drop of rain.

Amidst the uproar over U.S. Senate candidate Rand Paul’s recent comments about federal civil rights legislation, state Sen. Gerald Neal, D-Louisville, came rushing into the Capitol to file [Senate Resolution 31](#), a measure that reaffirms disdain for discrimination.

No problem. Almost all of Neal’s fellow senators from both political parties signed on. They should.

But that’s the easy party. Anyone can agree with *rhetoric* about banning discrimination.

I’m just wondering when Neal and his fellow black legislature will begin the real work of ensuring that the promise of the historic [Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling in 1954](#) — which Neal referenced in his resolution — is finally fulfilled.

Flowery resolutions don’t close academic, graduation, income and opportunity gaps for blacks — or end discrimination.

While Neal’s resolution reaffirmed the *words* of civil rights laws, many black students in public schools in his district must continue to sit in the back of the learning bus.

Sure, the bus takes black students halfway across a city, allowing “educrats” and their political pals to crow about how they meet artificially determined racial quotas in Louisville schools.

But what does that matter if the students don’t graduate, can’t get a job and get shut out of the neighborhoods the law now says they can live in?

Pop quiz: “Which problem threatens the future of the commonwealth and this country more: Questioning decades-old legislation or the fact that half of all black males fail to graduate from high school?”

A few years ago, Neal was instrumental in helping get a portion of Interstate 65 running through Jefferson County named the “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Expressway.”

It’s a great thing. But when I see that sign with King’s name on it, I don’t think: “Gee, how lucky we are to have Gerald Neal up there in Frankfort fighting the great civil rights fights.”

Instead, I worry.

I worry about too many politicians passing resolutions and giving speeches — but never really entering the ring to fight for equality.

The fight is in Neal's home district. Recent state testing results show that:

- Only 22 percent of [Jefferson County Public Schools](#) black high school students are math-proficient.
- There is a 30-point gap between the math-proficiency rates of blacks and whites.
- In more than one-third of the 120 Jefferson County Public Schools with sufficient data, the gap between black and white students is widening in key academic areas.
- Using a reliable graduation-rate estimation formula created by Johns Hopkins University, black males in only three of Louisville's 19 high schools had graduation rates equal to or greater than the statewide graduation rate for all students.

Seriously, senator, is this the equality for which King fought?

No greater words were ever written than: “. . . all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

But if – by virtue of an inferior education – society's neediest children cannot access these privileges and benefits, then those virtuous words offer nothing but the cloudy façade of equality with no chance of rain.

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